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Connecticut General Assembly



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Permanent Commission on the Status of Women

*The State's leading force for women's equality*

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**Testimony of  
 Teresa Younger, Executive Director  
 Permanent Commission on the Status of Women  
 Before the Appropriations Committee  
 Thursday, February 18, 2010**

**Re: PCSW Budget**

Greetings, Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and members of the Appropriations Committee:

I'm Teresa Younger, Executive Director of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women.

Thank you all for doing your very difficult job with resolve, compassion and prudence. When I was being interviewed for the position as Executive Director of the PCSW, I told the selection committee that I while I loved the work, mission and mandate of the agency, I hoped one day we would no longer need a Commission on the status of women because women will have achieved full equality. And I share with all of you today, my hope that one of these days, I actually do come before you urging you to *eliminate* the PCSW. But in all honesty that day is NOT today. Hope and hard work have only gotten us so far and we are not there yet. Perhaps, someday our work will no longer be needed because by then women will make the same pay as men, will *not* pay more for their healthcare, and we will make up half the heads of corporations, half the directors on state and corporate boards and commissions, will not have to fight for health care access and health research, and will file no discrimination complaints because there is no longer harassment at work; when there's no domestic violence, and young women grow up believing they can live safely, and securely, into their old age – because they truly can.

Unfortunately, we all know that day isn't coming any time soon. And I know you're growing weary of hearing tales of woe. So, while I'm here today to urge you to retain the PCSW's funding, which the Governor has slated for elimination, I'm also very *pleased* to be able to highlight some of the important things we've accomplished this year *despite* the nearly 65% cut we've already borne, with *half* the staff we had a year ago, and with 20% pay cuts to the remaining staff.

I'm not glossing over what a difficult year this has been; instead I want to acknowledge that as an arm of the legislature, we continue to be *absolutely committed* to bringing the government to 51 percent of the population. Every day, my staff and I come to work aware of what a privilege it is to serve as *the* voice of women in this state and at the Capitol.

If enacted, the Governor's budget will roll back policy initiatives and recommendations that have made Connecticut a progressive place to live. About 20% of Connecticut's working families do not have enough

income to meet their basic costs of living. Of the 20%, female head of households are more than twice as likely to have income below the self-sufficiency standard as those maintained by men. The Great Recession has disproportionately impacted women and their families. In December, the unemployment rate nationally was 12.9% among women who maintain families (15.2% for African American and 12.1% for Hispanic women householders). Most of these are women supporting their children, but increasingly they include older women who need to continue working past normal retirement age. Last November, the USDA reported that one in three single mothers had struggled for food during 2009 and that more than one in seven said someone in their home had been hungry. Many challenges lie ahead and women understand as well as anyone the consequences of decisions that need to be made; they only want those decisions to be well informed and intentional.

Over the past year, the PCSW, like the other legislative commissions, has come under fire from some quarters for being an "advocacy" organization. And while we're not on the front line of advocacy, we do, in fact, directly affect the public policy that makes the best advocacy possible. After all, the word "advocacy" comes from the Latin meaning "to call together – to summon." That's what we do: we call together the various, diverse voices from across the state so you, as legislators, know what's on the minds of your constituents. Last week, we had well over 100 of them come to our annual "Women's Day at the Capitol" to voice concern on issues ranging from education to pay equity to incarcerated women to housing to leadership development to environmental pollutants. On that day, a crowd of women diverse in its racial composition, the ages of its members, economic strata, profession and geography, bore witness to the importance of the PCSW's work on issues of women's health and safety, economic security and the elimination of sex discrimination.

Advocacy is only part of what we do. Our work also emanates *from the Capitol to the women and families* you represent. Our job is to provide information, research, analysis, and assistance to the General Assembly, State agencies, state leaders and the public on all matters concerning women. In the past year, we've spoken to 60 groups, had more than one million hits to our website from a block away and as far away as France, Korea and India. We've had several hundred calls to our office for assistance, and a hundred media hits. We monitored over 200 bills, testified on over 50 and have been at the apex of several critical issues.

As you and your fellow legislators agonize over where to cut, please think about what will be lost if the PCSW is lost. Prevention is the key to State savings and, as you know, it sometimes takes time to see the fruits of our labor. Many of our responsibilities are on-going because change takes time. A lawsuit finally settled last month against the Connecticut Department of Corrections is a perfect example. In 2003, when DOC corrections officers and other staff alleged serious misconduct by coworkers and supervisors, PCSW was asked to step in. It was a process that Senator Prague, I'm sure, recalls very well. Through a court-ordered stipulated agreement, the PCSW retained former Superior Court Judge Beverly Hodgson to serve as Sexual Harassment Consultant to monitor all investigations and resolutions of sexual harassment and retaliation claims, and to assist the Department in improving its policies and procedures. We monitored the performance of the Department as it implemented measures to change the culture of sexual harassment then prevalent there. The original suit may have been near \$125 million; the final settlement was \$1.5 million. Though it took time and commitment, the culture of harassment at the DOC changed and the people of Connecticut are better off.

Prior to our cuts, we regularly provided sexual harassment awareness and prevention training to State agencies. Over the past ten years, the PCSW has trained nearly 10,000 State employees in agencies such as the Banking Department, Connecticut State University System Central Office, the Department of Revenue Services, the Department of Correction, the Office of the Attorney General and Legislative Management. These trainings were once free but now State agencies pay between \$300-\$600 for a two-hour sexual harassment training session required by law for all supervisors.

Without such training, the State, as an employer, is vulnerable to additional sexual harassment lawsuits, potentially costing the taxpayers millions of dollars, and untold distress. Our role will now be to serve more as a watchdog to monitor whether State agencies are actually providing these required trainings and if so, by whom. The savings from a preventable lawsuit saves the people in this state millions of dollars and reinforces a positive work environment.

There are many such opportunities for us to bring together voices that matter; to ask the difficult, critical questions; yes, to be the watchdog. That's our mandate: to study all matters concerning women and to act on those findings so the people most likely to have the deepest effect on our society can be informed. Women make most of the economic decisions affecting families. Women determine how children are educated. Women make up half the workforce, are twice as likely as men to volunteer and make 80% of philanthropic contributions. And PCSW is the one out there talking with this highly influential – but underrepresented – population.

We have over the years convened a variety of groups in order to bring issues to state government; the PCSW convenes the *Young Women's Leadership Program*, which highlights the concerns of women ages 18-35 years; convened the *Connecticut Women's Health Campaign*, a statewide coalition of experts and advocates working together to improve health care for women and girls; and the *Women In the Trades Exchange*, to increase opportunities for women in the skilled trades and technical careers. Additionally, we go where the women are through public hearings that we hold throughout the state that give voice to women by highlighting their concerns about financial security. PCSW provides leadership and expertise on 10 statutorily mandated bodies; six boards and 17 coalitions.

As the convening agency of the Trafficking in Persons Council, we have worked with Senator Stillman and the Council members issuing reports, and proposing legislation that provides victims services and enhances training and services for victims.

Because of the work of the PCSW, our state government has been better equipped to address the needs of working parents, victims of sexual harassment, women with health care concerns such as breast cancer and osteoporosis, women business owners, parents seeking child support, women leaving welfare for work, childcare workers, and women entering nontraditional occupations.

These are just some of the ways in which the PCSW's work has helped gain our state recognition as a national leader on the issues of women's economic security, health and safety and gender discrimination.

Please do not let the cuts proposed by the Governor change all that.

PCSW is not merely another advocacy or public policy agency. We are the *only nonpartisan comprehensive* state institution that evaluates laws and policies for their impact on the lives of women and their families.

We represent a small investment that produces a sizeable and valuable return. Our budget for FY 10 is \$452,000. That's 32 cents for each of Connecticut's 1,399,625 women over the age of 18. This doesn't even include the next generation of women who will work, pay taxes, raise families or vote in Connecticut. I would argue that this is a worthy investment of "the people's money."

Before I conclude, let me applaud all of you for the policy and legislative initiatives you all have taken over the years that support women and their families; such as FMLA, defining and prohibiting sexual harassment, last year's Equal Pay for Equal Work bill, support of emergency contraception, expansions to Unemployment Insurance, Husky A and B, ensuring minimum hospital stays for maternal care, stopping drive thru mastectomies, establishing a Career Ladders Advisory Committee, and expanding minimum wage, just to name a few.

Thank you, in advance, for reading through the packet we are providing. In it, you'll find our RBA information; some examples of the Research Briefs we make available to you and your fellow legislators; our Legislative Priorities, and a summary of the past year's work.

Thank you.